Experience and its representations are never just given, especially when those experiences and representations fall into the categories that we label ‘religious’. They are always modified by the subject’s material and discursive position, their situation in language, culture and history. Such modification applies, moreover, not only to those who could be designated the initial subjects of experience, but also of those who hear, read or study their representations. Furthermore, these material and discursive positions reveal differentials of power and status: as Foucault has taught us, what counts as a true representation is closely related to who has the power to do the counting.

The Centre for Religion, Culture and Gender in the Department of Religions and Theology at the University of Manchester takes the exploration of these issues as among its central concerns, approaching them through a range of traditional disciplines and pushing back traditional disciplinary boundaries. It is therefore with great pleasure that I accepted the opportunity to edit this issue of the *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* on behalf of the Centre. In it we investigate the triangulation of representation, gender and experience in a wide variety of contexts, paying special attention to gendered dimensions of cultural and religious diversities, past and present, in Britain and abroad. Contrary to a prominent stream in Anglo-American writings, one of the assumptions running through all these articles is that so-called ‘empirical reality’ must always be interrogated with alertness to the gendered power at work in their social constructions. We can never rest content that what we take as our experience is unproblematically ‘how things are’. For whose comfort and for whose discomfort is experience represented thus?

Early in the planning of this issue, it was decided that contributions should be sought from a wide range of scholars who engage in methodological reflections on case studies of particular figures or themes, or who develop theoretical issues surrounding representation, gender and experience. Many distinguished friends...
and colleagues with a wide range of expertise from the University of Manchester and abroad were eager to contribute articles. We have selected articles on the basis of their interest and academic merit from scholars who are already well known internationally as well as from those whose wider reputation is still in the future; and apologize to those whose articles we could not include. The result of the mixture of contributors is a very rich issue whose themes and motifs spontaneously weave and recur through many articles: post-colonial concerns, concerns with authority and representation, masculinities, formation of subjectivities through film and liturgy, through suffering and flourishing.

I wish to express my gratitude to the John Rylands Research Institute; to Dr Dorothy Clayton and the Editorial board of the *Bulletin* for the invitation to guest edit this issue; to Barbara Underwood for administrative assistance; to the Directors of the Centre for Religion, Culture and Gender for their generous enthusiasm and helpful suggestions. Above all I wish to thank each contributor for their entertaining and instructive essays which demonstrate across many fields of expertise the pleasure and profit of fine scholarship. Not only do they discuss issues of representation, gender and experience. They also enable the reader to represent his/her own gendered experiences in ways that otherwise might not have been thought.